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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RICE MEETS UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MICHEL SIDIBE

REF: GENEVA 00148

¶1. Summary: In a March 2 meeting, Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), discussed with Ambassador Rice efforts to prevent transmission to children, support for their HIV-positive parents, and other key priorities. Ambassador Rice invited him to approach the United States on key issues where we can be helpful. End summary.

FIGHTING MOTHER TO CHILD TRANSMISSION AND SUPPORTING
HIV-POSITIVE PARENTS

¶2. UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibe, in New York to attend the Commission on the Status of Women, called on Ambassador Rice to discuss key initiatives. Sidibe wants to end pediatric AIDS and "save mothers and babies." Comparing the 139 cases of pediatric AIDS in the United States with the over 300,000 cases in Africa, Sidibe said "fundamental change is possible" and "it is possible to end pediatric AIDS by 2015." He pointed out that if a country like Botswana can achieve almost 100% coverage for ARV treatment, we can also meet this goal worldwide. The Clinton Global Initiative and French-led UNITAID, said Sidibe, are working on pediatric drugs and lowering their cost.

¶3. In response to Ambassador Rice's question as to how Sidibe's goal was being implemented, he replied that UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO are working on a joint implementation program to address maternal and reproductive health in the fight against AIDS. Ambassador Rice emphasized the importance of providing support to HIV-positive parents so that their children do not become orphans. Sidibe expressed his concern that caring systems and a caring society were under threat and that this in turn threatens the ability of societies to cope with HIV/AIDS. He said it is important to improve women's access to resources and education and energize a political movement to address violence against women. Citing the connection between sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, Sidibe noted that there are over 50,000 rapes in South Africa. The fight against HIV/AIDS can be a political agent to ask for the needed changes to the law, justice system, and safety net, he said.

OTHER PRIORITIES - INTRAVENOUS DRUG USERS, LGBT, SEX WORKERS,
AND TUBERCULOSIS

¶4. Touching on other priorities, Sidibe said that he wanted

to end the criminalization of transmission of HIV in the context of intravenous drug users. He wants to steer away from the concept of harm reduction because of the difficulties that many have with that concept. In upcoming UNODC meetings in Vienna, Sidibe would like people to focus on the programmatic side and examine the evidence on syringe exchange and methadone. Sidibe also stressed the major problem of homophobia, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean. He personally intervened in Burundi to oppose efforts by the legislature to criminalize homosexuality and in Senegal and Uganda to offer support for gay men who had been arrested. Sidibe emphasized that the issue of sex workers, particularly in Asia, is also a major concern of his. Finally, he opined that no one with AIDS should die from tuberculosis.

¶5. Ambassador Rice said that she found Sidibe's progressive wisdom very encouraging. She invited him to let the United States know of specific areas and initiatives where we can be helpful. She emphasized that U.S. policy opposes discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Ambassador Rice also agreed with Sidibe that it was important to maximize the development impact of money being spent to combat HIV/AIDS.
Rice